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Cultural Variations in Social Sharing of Emotions : An Intercultural Perspective

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Prior research has established that the "social sharing" of emotions is an integral part of an emotional experience. Whereas earlier studies have focused on universal features of sharing (e.g., rate, frequency, delay), this study investigates social and relational aspects of sharing hypothesized to be more open to cultural variation. A total of 555 adolescents from the Indian, immigrant Indian, and the English culture recalled episodes of fear, shame, and sadness, and answered questions related to the sharing of these experiences. Results revealed that each of these emotions is associated with sharing patterns that are unique to them. The cross-cultural differences in sharing evidenced related to a greater importance and implication of the ingroup in the emotional lives of adolescents in the Indian and immigrant Indian adolescent groups, as compared to the English adolescents.

CULTURAL VARIATIONS IN SOCIAL SHARING OF EMOTIONS An Intercultural Perspective

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Social sharing is the term used to describe the process during which a person, having experienced an emotion, recounts this experience to his or her social environment. The process essentially entails the transmission of information and experience of a personal and emotional nature, from the person experiencing the emotion to his or her sociocultural environment. Rimé (1989; Rimé, Philippot, Boca, & Mesquita, 1992) defines social sharing as having two prerequisites, (a) the reevocation of an emotion in a socially shared language, and (b) at least at the symbolic level, an addressee. For some time, there has been considerable evidence to show that a major negative emotional experience (earthquake, war, loss of spouse/child, etc.) often comes with social sharing (e.g., Pennebaker & Harber, 1993; Tait & Silver, 1989).

More recently, several studies have shown that social sharing is in fact associated with most emotional experiences, both positive and negative, and that it is present in a number of different cultures (Rimé, Finkenauer, Luminet, Zech, & Philippot, 1998; Rimé, Mesquita, Philippot, & Boca, 1991; Rimé et al., 1992). The current study carries the investigation into social sharing a few steps further in two ways. First, it extends the range of social sharing variables examined by going beyond the commonly used measures of rate, delay, and frequency to examine the relational and social aspects of the sharing process. Second, it explores the process of social sharing from a cross-cultural perspective, in view of the fact that most of the existing data in this field are from respondents in Western European countries.

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SOCIAL SHARING AS A PART OF THE EMOTION PROCESS

Emotion has often been described as a multicomponent (e.g., Scherer, 1984) or a multifaceted phenomena (e.g., Frijda, 1986). More recently, research carried out by Rimé and his colleagues has established social sharing to be an important part of the subjective component of emotion. Their work and other experimental and retrospective studies provide extensive evidence showing that social sharing is associated with more than 80% of emotional experiences, both intense and moderate emotions (Mesquita, 1993; Rimé et al., 1991, 1992, 1998; Singh-Manoux, 1998).

The experience of an emotion involves individuals processing the event and its implications by recycling or rehearsing the event (Horowitz, 1979). This rehearsal is believed to enable individuals to gradually tolerate more distressing aspects of the event (Horowitz, 1979, 1982, 1986), find acceptable meaning in the event (Tait & Silver, 1989; Taylor, 1983), and rebuild their belief system, which may have been affected by the emotional event (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). In other words, emotional information processing allows the individual to integrate and assimilate emotional experiences into existing beliefs and, if required, to recover from them. As social sharing entails repetition and recounting of the event, it is likely to be involved in the process of emotion processing and recovery. Also, talking to others about the emotional event and related concerns may serve to directly communicate the individual's needs to others, who may help the individual to cope with the emotional event and its consequences.

There are several reasons to suggest that social sharing may be a necessary and integral part of most emotional experiences. At the individual level, sharing of an emotion with another person may go some way in meeting the needs of social comparison, cognitive articulation, dissonance reduction, and that of coping that are engendered by the experience of an emotion (Rimé et al., 1991, 1998). At the sociocultural level, it is thought to be involved in the construction of both personal and group memory for important events (Rimé et al., 1998), and the social knowledge of emotion (Rimé, 1995).

EMOTION AND CULTURE

Although the described literature seems to suggest that social sharing is widespread and that it may play an important role in coping with emotional events, little is known about the manner in which social sharing is shaped and informed by the sociocultural context in which it occurs. This is especially true considering the increasing attention being paid to the fundamentally relational nature of emotions (Frijda & Mesquita, 1994; Keltner & Gross, 1999; Keltner & Haidt, 1999). There is also a growing awareness of the fact that emotions and culture have a reciprocal effect on one another (Keltner & Haidt, 1999; Kitayama & Markus, 1994; Markus & Kitayama, 1991, 1994). Sociocultural norms and expectations, governing both the experience and the expression of emotion, influence several aspects of the emotion process. Furthermore, cultural groups have been found to differ on how relationships with others are handled and the way in which social control is used (Parkinson & Manstead, 1992; Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988). It thus seems feasible that there are culturally defined ways of emotion management, making the existence of cross-cultural differences in social sharing very likely.

One of the explanations offered by researchers to account for the cultural variation in psychological functioning, broadly, is that of individualism/collectivism (Hofstede, 1980; Hui & Triandis, 1986). Individualists see themselves as distinct from any group; and what is

more, they pursue needs, interests, and goals that are private and unique to themselves. The core values of an individualistic group are autonomy, competitiveness, self-sufficiency, and achievement. Collectivists value harmony and group solidarity and are willing to sacrifice personal interests and goals for those of the group. Here, the self is defined as part of a group (Triandis, 1994), leading not only to an emotional attachment to the group but also to heightened concerns about self-presentation and loss of face. One of the defining aspects of collectivism is the concern that one has for others (Hui & Triandis, 1986), resulting in the subordination of individual goals to the goals of a collective, and a pursuit of harmony and interdependence within the group.

Individualism has been associated with a higher need for affiliation (Hui & Villareal, 1989), the explanation for this link lying in the ease with which people in individualistic cultures make friends and enter social groups. However, the aforesaid link between affiliation and individualism is qualified by the finding that collectivists may interact with fewer people, but they tend to have more intimate relationships (Wheeler, Reis, & Bond, 1989). These various aspects of individualism and collectivism will, inevitably, be reflected in the process of social sharing, which entails the involvement of the sociocultural group in the emotional life of the individual.

To examine the differences in social sharing across cultures varying in individualism and collectivism, we conducted an exploratory study among adolescents. Adolescents participating in this study were drawn from three cultures, namely, Indian, immigrant Indian, and English. These cultures represent different levels of individualism, the English culture is rated as being highly individualistic and the Indian culture the least individualistic (Hofstede, 1980). As several studies have already clearly established the predominantly collectivistic orientation of Indians (e.g., Agarwal & Misra, 1986; Misra & Gergen, 1993; Verma, 1985) and the individualistic orientation of the English, the present study did not include a specific measure of individualism and collectivism.

The immigrant Indian group examined here forms a true ethnocultural group (cf. Berry, Poortinga, Segall, & Dasen, 1992) in that its members interact socially, and retain their own practices in matters of language, religion, and social norms. The psychological functioning of an immigrant group is influenced both by the host culture and the individual's own culture, with an emphasis on the original culture's position for issues that are private and agreement with the host culture's point of view on issues that are public (Triandis, Kashima, Shimada, & Villareal, 1986). As emotions relate to the private aspects of an individual's life, the immigrant group can be expected to show sharing patterns that resemble the patterns found in the original culture rather than the host culture.

This study explores the social sharing associated with three emotions, namely fear, sadness, and shame. Given that positive and negative emotions are associated with distinct patterns of characteristics (cf. Diener & Emmons, 1985; Mesquita, 1993), an attempt to exclude emotional valence as a confounding variable in the analyses was made by only examining negative emotions. This small subset of emotions has previously been included in most studies on social sharing (cf. Rimé et al., 1991, 1992) and, if required, will allow for comparison of results. All three emotions are similar in that they involve withdrawal behavior as opposed to aggressive-approach behavior (Scherer & Wallbott, 1994). However, shame differs from fear and sadness on a few crucial aspects. It is typically the result of norm transgressions (Frijda, 1993; Manstead & Tetlock, 1989), with the self being held responsible for the causality regarding this emotion (Scherer, 1997). Indeed, the sharing of shame has been found to differ from the sharing of the other emotions (Rimé et al. 1991, 1992). Moreover, it is

possible that shame will be shared differently in different cultures as it is a “social emotion” (Caplowitz-Barrett, 1995; Mesquita, 1993), and is, therefore, more open to learning and socialization processes (cf. Scherer & Wallbott, 1994).

HYPOTHESES

Rate, delay, and frequency of sharing. Considering that the sharing of shame is likely to involve admitting to norm transgressions, it is expected to be associated with both a lower rate and a lower frequency of sharing compared to both fear and sadness in the three groups.

As documented earlier (Rimé et al., 1998), collectivists are expected to register a lower frequency of sharing as compared to the individualists, both in terms of the number of times of sharing and the number of people with whom the emotional event is shared. It is likely that this is because collectivists interact with a limited number of people due to their association with fewer ingroups. This main affect of culture will test for lower frequency of sharing in the Indian and the immigrant Indian groups as compared to the English group.

Identity of sharing partner. Adolescence entails both closer relationships (Flannery, Torquati, & Lindemeier, 1994) and more self-disclosure (Franzoi & Davis, 1985) with peers. This leads us to predict that in the three groups, adolescents will choose friends over others as preferred sharing partners. Moreover, we expect this effect to be particularly true in the collectivistic cultures in which friendships are closer (Verkuyten & Masson, 1996), and the adolescent's relationship with parents is unequal due to the higher power distance found in these cultures (Hofstede, 1980). Consequently, the Indian and the immigrant Indian groups are expected to share more with friends than parents when compared to the English group.

As compared to fear and sadness, the self is more to blame for the experiences of shame, consequently it is less likely to be shared with parents in all three groups.

Initiation of sharing: self/sharing partner/other. Collectivists feel a higher degree of involvement in the lives of other members of the ingroup (Hui & Triandis, 1986), hence the social environment will be expected to initiate sharing in the collectivistic Indian and immigrant Indian cultures to a greater extent. This leads us to predict that sharing partners in the Indian and the immigrant Indian groups will initiate sharing of the emotions examined to a greater extent as compared to the English group. Considering that shame entails perceived inconsistencies with personal standards or falling short of the expectations of others (Manstead & Tetlock, 1989), we expect the respondents themselves to initiate sharing it to a lesser degree in comparison to fear and sadness in all three groups.

Content of sharing. The closer relationship between the individual and the ingroup in collectivistic cultures will induce more intimate sharing than in individualistic cultures. The intimate sharing in Indian and the immigrant Indian group will take the form of sharing of feelings and a greater demand for help/advice, rather than factual details concerning the emotional event.

The experience of shame involves causal attribution typically directed toward the self, along with a greater inconsistency between one's behavior during the event and internal standards (Scherer, 1997), leading us to believe that the respondent is unlikely to delve too deeply into their feelings while talking about shame. In fact, the sharing of shame events in all three

groups is expected to entail the sharing of factual details concerning the event rather than the feelings of the sharer.

Reaction of the sharing partner. Closer involvement of the ingroup in collectivistic cultures is expected to be reflected in the more active role taken by sharing partners in collectivistic cultures as opposed to the passive reaction of the individualistic sharing partner (Mesquita, 1993). More precisely, this active role taken by the sharing partners in the Indian and the immigrant Indian groups will lead them to give advice and want to do something about the emotional event.

The main effect of emotion type on the reaction of the sharing partner is related to shame being distinct from the other two emotions. Shame results from transgressions of social norms, and for social norms to operate adequately, transgressions of these norms need to be sanctioned by the social group. Consequently, the sharing partner in all three groups will be expected to be more critical of the respondent when experiences of shame are shared as compared to the sharing of fear and sadness.

Perceived effects of sharing. Given the way in which the emotional lives of the collectivists has been conceptualized, it is hypothesized that the Indian and the immigrant Indian groups will perceive the relational benefits of sharing, in terms of feeling close to the sharing partner, to a greater extent when compared to the English group.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

The participants were 9th and 11th graders from public schools in New Delhi in India and London in the United Kingdom. Participation of the respondents was solicited through the help of the school authorities, and no payments were made either to the schools or to the respondents. The criterion used for the identification of the immigrant Indian sample was based on the "ethnic identity forms," which are routinely filled in by students and held in the records of schools in London. All the respondents from the English sample were Caucasian.

In all, 585 adolescents responded to the questionnaire; 30 (5.1% of all questionnaires) of these questionnaires were rejected on grounds of being incomplete. The final sample was composed of 179 Indian adolescents from New Delhi (94 men and 85 women), 182 immigrant Indian (89 men and 93 women) and 194 English (99 men and 95 women) adolescents from London. The average age of the 9th graders was 14 years, 9 months (age range 13 years, 4 months to 16 years, 1 month), and that of the 11th graders was 16 years, 9 months (age range 15 years, 10 months to 18 years, 4 months). Of all the respondents, 51.5% were from the 9th grade and 48.5% of them were from the 11th grade; and there was no significant difference in the number of 9th and 11th graders in the three cultural groups, $\chi^2(2, N = 555) = 1.15, ns$.

Although it is difficult to ensure equivalence across samples, the socioeconomic status and the educational level of the schools represented in the sample was very similar. All the participating schools drew their students from the urban middle-class and had a homogeneous population. All the English adolescents of Indian origin who participated in this study were British citizens and were born and brought up in England. The Indian and the immigrant Indian group in this sample are similar in that they both have a Hindu background.

PROCEDURE

Several schools in the middle-class suburbs of London and New Delhi were sent a letter stating the purpose of the research and soliciting their participation in the research. The schools that wished to participate then contacted their respective 9th and 11th graders and informed them that this research was examining the emotional life of adolescents in different cultures. On a prearranged date, the experimenter met with a group, ranging from 12 to 15 respondents at one session in a classroom. The respondents were first given general background information on the nature of the research and were guaranteed total anonymity. The participants were reminded to choose only one response to multiple-choice questions and to encircle only one number in response to a scaled item. Finally, they were asked to recall a recent situation in which they had experienced a strong emotion of the kind indicated to answer the questionnaire. On average, the younger participants took 40 minutes to fill in the questionnaire and the older participants took about 25 minutes.

QUESTIONNAIRE

The social sharing questionnaire was nine pages long, with three sections, composed of three pages each for the three emotions examined (fear, sadness, and shame). The sequence of presentation of the three emotions was randomized over respondents to control for order effects. The construction of the questionnaire was based on semistructured, exploratory interviews carried out on adolescents in India and England. In addition, some of the items were drawn from the various questionnaires utilized by Rimé et al. (1991, 1992) in their investigation into social sharing. The final version of the questionnaire was pilot tested to ensure that participants from the target age groups understood the questionnaire and were capable of responding to it.

The first question asked the respondents to describe in a few sentences the situation that led to the experience of the emotion, followed by whether this experience had been shared (1 = yes, 2 = no). Subsequently, they answered questions relating to the delay of sharing, with (1 = same day, 2 = same week, 3 = same month, 4 = later, 5 = not yet shared), the frequency of sharing (1 = never, 2 = once, 3 = two to four times, 4 = more than five times) and the number of people with whom the experience had been shared (1 = nobody, 2 = one person, 3 = two to four people, 4 = more than five people). This was followed by a list of questions relating to the first sharing of the experience. The initial question here related to the identity of the sharing partner (parents/grandparents/uncle/aunt; brother/sister/cousin; stranger; a professional; boy/girl friend; friend). Then, on 3-point scales (1 = *never*; 3 = *always*), the respondents were asked whether the sharing had been initiated by themselves, the sharing partner, or external factors.

Thereafter, the content of the sharing ("asked for advice/help," "factual/superficial sharing," "intimate sharing of feelings") and the reaction of the sharing partner was assessed ("gave you advice," "listened and agreed," "criticized your behavior," "felt the same as you," "related a similar experience," "wanted to do something about what had happened to you") with the respondent having to choose the option that best described his or her own experience in relation to the emotion in question. Finally, the perceived effects of sharing by the participant were assessed on 5-point scales (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *very much*): (1) feeling better, (2) feeling relieved, (3) feeling no different, (4) feeling closer to the person with whom shared, (5) feeling calmer, and (6) feeling worse.

All participants responded to the questionnaire in English as this was the language of instruction in the participating schools. English is one of the national languages of India. Hindi, the other national language, is mostly employed in the north of India, and as the present sample was not composed exclusively of Hindi speakers, the English version of the questionnaire was the practical choice for the Indian sample.

RESULTS

The data analysis consisted of 3 (emotion) \times 3 (culture) repeated measures ANOVA, with emotion treated as a within-subject factor and culture as a between-subjects factor; and hierarchical loglinear analysis when dealing with categorical data. Loglinear analysis was used for model selection, which entailed commencing with higher order associations and eliminating as many of them as possible while still retaining a good fit between observed and expected cell frequencies. A good model is the one with a nonsignificant likelihood ratio statistic (G^2), indicating a model that is not significantly worse than a more complex one. The second step involved analyses with the best fitting model to explain the identified effects, with the focus here on a significant G^2 .

RATE, DELAY, AND FREQUENCY OF SHARING

As predicted, shame was associated with a lower rate of sharing ($\chi^2(2, N = 555) = 33.10, p < .001$) as compared to the other two emotions (sharing rate: 80.5% fear, 69.0% shame, and 82.3% sadness). The analysis concerning the effect of emotion type on frequency also supported the hypothesis, both for number of times of sharing, $F(2, 551) = 23.96, p < .001$, and number of people with whom shared, $F(2, 551) = 21.61, p < .001$. Shame, as compared to the emotions of fear and sadness, was shared fewer times and with fewer people (see Table 1). Contrary to the hypothesis, there was no main effect of culture.

The average delay of sharing ($M = 2.58$) indicated that most experiences were shared, on average in a little over a week. Further analysis revealed that shame was shared with a longer delay, $F(2, 551) = 6.99, p < .001$, than either fear or sadness (see Table 1).

IDENTITY OF SHARING PARTNER

As predicted, friends were chosen as preferred sharing partners in all three groups (see Table 2), with the odds of choosing peers to parents being 2 to 1 across groups. The best fitting model, $G^2(24) = 30.13, p < .18$, identified using the backward elimination procedure in hierarchical loglinear analysis, included no interactions between culture and emotion but only main effects. Although there was a main effect of culture, partial $G^2(10) = 74.71, p < .01$, it was not the predicted effect of adolescents choosing to share less with parents in the Indian and immigrant Indian groups. Table 2 shows that the main effect of culture was due to the Indian and the immigrant Indian groups choosing to share with their siblings to a greater extent when compared to the English group.

As predicted, emotion type had an effect on the choice of sharing partners, partial $G^2(10) = 49.58, p < .01$. Adolescents chose parents as sharing partners when experiencing shame to a lesser degree as compared to fear and sadness. Results also revealed that the odds of sharing

TABLE 1
Delay and Frequency of Sharing as a Function of Culture and Emotion Type

	<i>Culture</i>							<i>Emotion Type</i>						
	<i>Indian</i>		<i>Immigrant Indian</i>		<i>English</i>		<i>F</i> _{2, 552}	<i>Fear</i>		<i>Shame</i>		<i>Sadness</i>		<i>F</i> _{2, 551}
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Delay of sharing	2.47	1.63	2.64	1.61	2.63	1.60	1.72	2.41	1.59	2.78	1.73	2.56	1.50	6.99***
Frequency														
Number of times	2.59	1.05	2.62	1.10	2.63	1.11	0.20	2.72	1.06	2.36	1.09	2.77	1.07	23.96***
Number of people	2.51	1.02	2.44	1.02	2.44	1.03	0.71	2.60	1.02	2.24	1.03	21.54	0.99	21.67***

*** $p < .001$.

fear with a professional (doctor, psychologist, etc.) are higher than sharing either shame or sadness with this category of sharing partner (see Table 2).

INITIATION OF SHARING: SELF/SHARING PARTNER/OTHER

Respondents reported initiating the sharing themselves to a greater extent ($M = 2.11$, $SD = .71$) as compared to sharing partners ($M = 1.70$, $SD = .73$) or external factors ($M = 1.77$, $SD = .69$). The predictions relating to the main effects of culture, $F(2, 258) = 8.31$, $p < .001$, and emotion type, $F(2, 257) = 13.72$, $p < .001$, were supported only partially. Only in the immigrant Indian group ($M = 1.86$, $SD = .77$) did the sharing partner initiate sharing to a greater extent as compared to the English ($M = 1.62$, $SD = .66$) and the Indian ($M = 1.63$, $SD = .73$) groups. As for effects of emotion type, it was both the sharing of shame ($M = 1.99$, $SD = .75$) and fear ($M = 2.08$, $SD = .68$) that was initiated by the sharer himself or herself to a lesser degree as compared to sadness ($M = 2.24$, $SD = .68$) across the three groups.

CONTENT OF SHARING

The content of sharing was analyzed through a loglinear model, the model with a good fit included only the main effects of culture and emotion type, $G^2(12) = 18.47$, $p < .10$. As predicted, culture affected the content of sharing, partial $G^2(4) = 76.31$, $p < .01$, but only one aspect of the hypothesis was supported by the data. As is clear from Table 3, the Indian participants were more likely than the immigrant Indian and the English groups to ask for advice or help during the sharing process. However, the three groups were equally likely to share their feelings. The results (see Table 3), through post hoc comparisons, also reveal that the odds of engaging in superficial sharing of factual details are higher in the English group as compared to the Indian group.

As expected, the experience of shame, partial $G^2(4) = 58.12$, $p < .01$, was associated most strongly with superficial sharing of factual details and less strongly with intimate sharing of feelings (see Table 3). The analysis also revealed that the odds for seeking help/advice during sharing fear are higher than during sharing shame or sadness.

TABLE 2
Identity of Sharing Partner as a Function of Culture and Emotion Type

Sharing Partner	Culture						Emotion Type					
	Indian		Immigrant Indian		English		Fear		Shame		Sadness	
	Odds		Odds		Odds		Odds		Odds		Odds	
	f	Ratio	f	Ratio	f	Ratio	f	Ratio	f	Ratio	f	Ratio
Parent/ grandparent	19.4	0.77	21.2	0.70	34.5	1.86	28.6	1.02	15.4	0.43**	30.0	2.27
Sibling	19.0	1.62	23.9	2.37**	7.5	0.26	17.4	0.77	17.0	1.04	15.5	1.25
Stranger	0.2	1.72	0.0	0.80	0.0	0.73	0.2	1.04	0.0	0.94	0.0	1.02
Professional	0.5	0.43	1.9	1.20	1.6	1.94	2.9	3.75*	0.8	1.04	0.2	0.26
Boy friend/ girl friend	5.9	0.91	5.3	0.70	7.9	1.59	5.6	0.58	8.4	1.75	5.5	0.98
Friend	55.0	1.19	47.7	0.91	48.5	0.92	45.2	0.56	58.5	1.30	48.8	1.38

NOTE: Frequency figures show the percentage of participants who checked that alternative.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

TABLE 3
Content of Sharing as a Function of Culture and Emotion Type

Content of Sharing	Culture						Emotion Type					
	Indian		Immigrant Indian		English		Fear		Shame		Sadness	
	Odds		Odds		Odds		Odds		Odds		Odds	
	f	Ratio	f	Ratio	f	Ratio	f	Ratio	f	Ratio	f	Ratio
Seeking help/ advice	24.6	3.13**	11.9	0.96	05.2	0.33	17.9	1.38*	11.5	0.74	11.8	0.98
Superficial sharing	27.9	0.52**	34.6	0.98	41.3	1.98	41.8	1.27*	38.6	1.35*	24.3	0.58
Intimate sharing	47.5	0.62	53.5	1.06	53.5	0.66	40.3	0.57	49.9	1.00	63.9	1.75*

NOTE: Frequency figures show the percentage of participants who checked that alternative.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

REACTION OF THE SHARING PARTNER

Loglinear analysis revealed that culture had an effect on the response of the sharing partner, partial $G^2(10) = 99.40$, $p < .01$. As predicted, more of the sharing partners in the Indian group reacted actively by dispensing advice, whereas more of the English sharing partners reacted passively by listening and agreeing with the sharer (see Table 4). The emotion type affected the reaction of the sharing partners, partial $G^2(10) = 152.57$, $p < .01$. As predicted, the odds of the sharing partner being critical are much higher for the experience of shame than for the other two emotions (see Table 4). The other effect of emotion type revealed that sharing partners were more likely to respond actively (gave advice, wanted to do something

TABLE 4
Reaction of Sharing Partner as a Function of Culture and Emotion Type

<i>Reaction of Partner</i>	<i>Culture</i>						<i>Emotion Type</i>					
	<i>Indian</i>		<i>Immigrant Indian</i>		<i>English</i>		<i>Fear</i>		<i>Shame</i>		<i>Sadness</i>	
	<i>Odds</i>		<i>Odds</i>		<i>Odds</i>		<i>Odds</i>		<i>Odds</i>		<i>Odds</i>	
	<i>f</i>	<i>Ratio</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>Ratio</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>Ratio</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>Ratio</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>Ratio</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>Ratio</i>
Gave advice	36.5	2.51**	24.3	1.25	11.3	0.32	20.6	0.67*	24.5	0.94	26.7	1.59
Listened and agreed	12.9	0.39**	21.0	1.02	30.2	2.51	24.6	1.04	17.0	0.61**	22.1	1.59
Criticized your behavior	08.2	1.02	10.3	1.03	09.8	0.76	06.9	0.77	19.8	5.94**	03.1	0.22
Felt the same as you	15.4	0.84	19.8	0.91	21.1	1.32	13.9	0.62*	11.0	0.37**	30.2	4.40
Related similar experience	16.9	0.84	17.2	0.91	18.8	1.32	20.1	1.17	21.2	1.32	12.2	0.64
Wanted to do something	10.0	1.43	07.4	0.74	08.8	0.94	13.9	2.56*	06.5	0.61	05.7	0.64

NOTE: Frequency figures show the percentage of participants who checked that alternative.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

about the incident) for the experience of fear, and more supportively (listened and agreed, felt the same) for the experience of sadness (see Table 4).

PERCEIVED EFFECTS OF SHARING

As predicted, a culture \times emotion type \times effects of sharing MANOVA revealed a multivariate effect of culture, $F(6, 254) = 4.95, p < .001$. The results supported the hypothesis that the Indian and the immigrant Indian groups would report feeling closer to the sharing partner more strongly than the English participants (see Table 5). The analysis also revealed that compared to the English group, the Indians and the immigrant Indians also reported other benefits of sharing—feeling better and relieved as a result of sharing.

There was an unpredicted main effect of emotion type, $F(12, 247) = 3.33, p < .001$. This effect was traced to the following results: the effects of feeling better, relieved, and calmer after sharing were more strongly associated with the experience of fear as compared to the experiences of shame and sadness; and the emotion of sadness was seen to lead to feelings of closeness with the sharing partner when compared to the other two emotions.

DISCUSSION

The essential goal of this study was to examine a broad range of social sharing variables from a cross-cultural perspective. The results indicate that a majority of emotions experienced by individuals are shared, and that they are shared several times and with several people. For the adolescent population, friends constitute the favored sharing partners, with parents and siblings coming some way behind. The sharing process is mostly initiated by the sharer himself or herself. It entails the sharing of feelings by the person experiencing the

TABLE 5
Perceived Effects of Sharing as a Function of Culture and Emotion Type

Effects of Sharing	Culture						F(2, 258)	Emotion Type						F(2, 258)		
			Immigrant		English					Fear		Shame			Sadness	
	Indian		Indian													
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		M	SD
Better	3.55	1.43	3.37	1.41	3.02	1.35	6.15**	3.39	1.39	3.19	1.47	3.32	1.44	5.07**		
Relieved	3.28	1.44	3.03	1.45	2.75	1.41	6.31**	3.23	1.40	2.99	1.42	2.83	1.49	3.30*		
No different	1.85	1.28	2.05	1.35	2.03	1.44	2.81	1.95	1.35	1.98	1.34	2.01	1.40	< 1		
Closer to partner	3.01	1.51	2.88	1.43	2.21	1.32	11.10***	2.57	1.41	2.62	1.51	2.88	1.47	6.82***		
Calmer	3.14	1.39	3.02	1.34	2.88	1.34	1.78	3.15	1.33	2.87	1.36	3.00	1.38	3.60*		
Worse	1.40	0.88	1.51	0.96	1.52	1.03	< 1	1.41	0.91	1.55	1.05	1.48	0.93	2.19		

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

emotion; with the sharing partner offering assistance and listening and agreeing with the sharer. The social-sharing literature suggests an inconsistent relationship between sharing and recovery when recovery is measured as the decrease in distress caused by the emotional event (e.g., Rimé et al., 1991, 1992). The results obtained from this study clearly show that the effects of sharing as perceived by the sharer include wider elements such as feelings of relief, calm, and closeness to the sharing partner.

SOCIAL SHARING ACROSS CULTURES

The measures of rate, delay, and frequency of sharing are similar in the three groups examined here, leading to the conclusion that these aspects of social sharing are not associated with the cultural context. However, the effect of culture, and the resulting emotional socialization on the other social-sharing variables, was found to be extensive. The importance of the effect of culture on the sharing process begins to emerge when one examines social-sharing variables that implicate the sociocultural environment. We had predicted that fewer adolescents from the Indian and immigrant Indian groups would share with their parents as compared to their peers from the English group. This hypothesis was based on the existence of a higher power distance in collectivistic cultures, in which an unequal distribution of power is quite acceptable, leading to a parent-adolescent relationship that is fairly unequal. An unequal parent-adolescent relationship would not be conducive to the sharing of personal emotional experiences. The results failed to support this hypothesis, indicating either that higher power distance does not manifest itself in the choice of sharing partners or that higher power distance does not effect the parent-adolescent relationship. Nevertheless, when compared to the English group, a greater proportion of the Indian and the immigrant Indian group share with their siblings, clearly reflecting the importance of family-related ingroups in the Indian culture (Verma, 1985).

The dimension on which respondents from the Indian and the immigrant Indian groups differ markedly from the English group relates to the extent to which the social environment is implicated in their emotional lives. The sharing partner was reported to initiate sharing more strongly in the immigrant Indian group as compared to the other two groups. The sharers in the Indian group not only demanded more help/advice, but also reported getting more help/advice from their sharing partners. In addition to perceiving the relational benefits of

sharing to a greater extent, the adolescents from both the Indian and the immigrant Indian group also saw sharing to be more beneficial in general.

The results clearly indicate that the individualistic or collectivistic orientation of the respondents is reflected in their social-sharing patterns. Individualists value their independence and self-sufficiency, leading their sharing to have a passive quality, with no great demands being made on the sociocultural environment during the sharing process. As compared to the Indian and the immigrant Indian group, a higher proportion of adolescents in the English group reported superficial sharing relating to factual details of the emotional event. The ingroup appears to respond in a similar fashion, with some detachment and little inclination to interfere. Here again, a higher proportion of the English sharing partners simply listened and agreed and fewer of them gave advice. The collectivists, on the other hand, value interdependence and emotional attachment to the ingroup, seeking to enhance it during the sharing process by actively involving the ingroup in their emotions. Respondents reported more benefits of sharing, both relational and personal (feeling better, feeling relieved) in the Indian and the immigrant Indian groups. This suggests that the process of sharing is more valued in the Indian and the immigrant Indian groups, bolstering the position that interdependence and concern for others are at the heart of collectivism.

The immigrant Indian group behaves very much like the Indian group, providing support for the assertion that on issues that are significant and personal, the conduct of the immigrant group resembles that of the original group. As compared to the English group, both the Indian and the immigrant Indian adolescents share more with siblings and appreciate relational and personal benefits of sharing to a greater extent. Their sharing is less passive and is less factual in content, and fewer of the sharing partners simply listen and agree. The sharing patterns of this immigrant group indicate that the importance of the ingroup and an individual's relationship with ingroup members is clearly unaffected by the host culture.

SOCIAL SHARING ACROSS EMOTION TYPE

The results obtained from the study examining social-sharing variables provide ample evidence to suggest that the sharing process is not independent of the kind of emotional experience being shared. The three emotions examined in this study reveal patterns of sharing that are unique to them, leading us to believe that different emotions are associated with distinct sharing patterns.

It is the experience of shame that is shared very differently when compared to the experiences of fear and sadness. Fewer of the shame experiences are shared to begin with, they are not only shared with a longer delay, but also shared less frequently and with fewer people. Parents and older family members are chosen less often as sharing partners for the purposes of sharing shame. The participants reported initiating the sharing of shame to a much lesser degree, the process entailing the sharing of factual details rather than feelings. The behavior of the sharing partner, in response to shame, also differs in that respondents report them to be more critical. The sharing of shame is also not associated with many benefits, either of a personal or a social nature.

The emotion of shame has been variously conceptualized as involving an inconsistency between an action and personal standards or expectations of others (Manstead & Tetlock, 1989), or resulting from incipient or actual social rejection (Frijda, 1993). The above-mentioned aspects of shame are plainly manifest in the sharing associated with this emotion. As compared to the other two emotions examined, it is not only shared differently, but also involves a distinct reaction from the social environment. The results here clearly show that

the person experiencing shame does not want to share it to the same extent as the other two emotions.

The emotion of sadness is a result of the absence of something one values (Frijda, 1993) or a separation from an object of attachment, and these antecedent qualities are clearly reflected in the way it is shared. Furthermore, the sharing partner behaves differently by initiating the sharing more and being more supportive of the person experiencing sadness. Fear is chiefly a response to threat (Frijda, 1993), and again this is evident in the various measures of social sharing. In an attempt to alleviate the threat, sharing fear is instituted by the sharer to a greater degree, individuals who can help practically are chosen more frequently as sharing partners, and active involvement of the sharing partner is solicited to a greater extent. The functionality of the sharing process is evident not only from reported feelings of relief and calm resulting from sharing, but also from the response of the sharing partner who reacts with greater offers of help, advice, and assistance on the part of the sharing partner.

A puzzling aspect of the results relates to the absence of interaction between culture and emotion type in the data. Shame is known to be more salient in collectivistic cultures (Bierbrauer, 1992; Hui & Triandis, 1986; Triandis et al., 1988), and it is also used more frequently as a mechanism of social control. The transgression of norms threatens the well-being of the group and ought to be sanctioned to a greater extent in collectivistic cultures. Nevertheless, the sharing pattern associated with shame was found to be similar in the three groups examined in this study. There is clear evidence to suggest that individuals with a collectivistic orientation respond to norm violations with more shame than those with an individualistic orientation (Bierbrauer, 1992); however, little is known about the quality of this experience and how the ingroup handles shame in collectivistic cultures. The results obtained here certainly suggest that the ingroups in the Indian and immigrant Indian groups are not more critical or unsympathetic as compared to those in English group, particularly for the adolescent population examined in this study.

In very general terms, it would appear that adolescents share differently than adults do. Their sharing rate (80%) is considerably lower than that of adults (90%, Rimé et al., 1991, 1992), and they share with a longer delay. Approximately 40% of adolescents in this study shared on the day they experienced the emotion as compared to 55% of the adult population in Rimé's studies (Rimé et al., 1991, 1992). These findings suggest that adolescents may be more concerned with how others view and evaluate them, leading them to be more cautious in sharing their emotions. Comparison between adult and adolescent sharing patterns on measures other than rate, delay, and frequency of sharing is not possible due to the paucity of data in what remains an emerging field of study. The results reported here already suggest that the concerns of the age group being examined will be reflected in the sharing patterns.

It is very clear from the results obtained in this study that there are important variations in the way in which different emotions are shared. This article has only examined the social sharing associated with three of the negative emotions, consequently it is unclear how the present results would relate to positive emotions. In future studies, it also would be important to examine the social-sharing patterns associated with more complex, socially constructed emotions (e.g., pride, embarrassment, guilt, and so forth). As emotions are best conceptualized as dynamic processes resulting from appraisals of the environment, complex emotions are likely to implicate societal standards to a greater extent. Some emotions, certainly those that are socially constructed, involve the appraisal of an event against social norms, cultural conventions, and the expectations of significant others to a greater degree. Cross-cultural comparisons of such emotions would serve to enhance the understanding of the way culture influences the social-sharing process.

Future research in this domain would benefit from the inclusion of a specific measure of individualism-collectivism. This would allow categorical relationships to be established between emotional behavior, social-sharing patterns in this case, and culture. It would also permit the examination of the individualism-collectivism variable at an individual level. In other words, the emotional behavior of idiocentrics and allocentrics, irrespective of their cultural grouping, could be examined.

The data reported in this research has the predicament of originating from verbal reports. However, it is now widely acknowledged that the retrospective questionnaire data on recalled emotional experiences has its place in the research on emotions (cf. Scherer, Wallbott, & Summerfield, 1986). The hypotheses generated by the data in this research can now be investigated in other studies using various methodological instruments.

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